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**Public Safety & Emergency Preparedness  
Committee**

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**HB 1214**

**Brief Description:** Establishing the volunteer search and rescue account.

**Sponsors:** Representatives O'Brien, Goodman, Hurst and Roberts.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Establishes the Volunteer Search and Rescue Account, funded by a surcharge on all recreational licenses issued by the Department of Fish and Wildlife, to provide reimbursement through the Emergency Management Division of the state Military Department to volunteer search and rescue organizations for expenses incurred in rendering assistance to law enforcement within the state.
- Authorizes a volunteer search and rescue organization to seek reimbursement up to \$500 from each person for whom the search and rescue activities were conducted, if assistance was required due to a violation of applicable laws or a failure to exercise reasonable care.

**Hearing Date:** 1/27/09

**Staff:** Lara Zarowsky (786-7123)

**Background:**

Emergency Management

Washington has in place a comprehensive emergency response system administered by the Emergency Management Division of the Washington Military Department (Department).

Each political subdivision of the state is authorized to create its own or participate in a joint organization for emergency management in order to facilitate emergency response at the local level. All Washington counties and 119 cities have established or participate in local organizations to perform local emergency management functions.

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

Expenditures from the Disaster Response Account may be used to support state agency and local government disaster response and recovery efforts.

#### Emergency Worker

An “emergency worker” is any person employed by the state or a political subdivision of the state who is called upon to perform emergency management activities, or any person who is registered with a local emergency management organization or the Department that holds an identification card for the purpose of engaging in authorized emergency management activities.

The Department currently recognizes 18 classes of emergency workers, including volunteer organizations formed for the purpose of assisting in local search and rescue activities.

#### Compensation Board

Each local organization for emergency management encompasses a compensation board that, among other things, processes claims for reimbursement by emergency workers. Compensation according to a statutory schedule is furnished to an emergency worker for expenses related to participation in emergency response, and for any injury or death arising out of and occurring in the course of emergency response activities, provided that the injury is not caused by the intoxication of the emergency worker and is not self-inflicted.

#### Search and Rescue

“Search and rescue” refers to the acts of searching for, rescuing, or recovering by means of ground, marine, or air activity any person who becomes lost, injured, or is killed while outdoors as a result of a natural, technological, or human caused disaster, including instances involving searches for downed aircraft when ground personnel are used.

The Department of Transportation administers all aerial search and rescue activities.

Search and rescue activities are initiated at the local level. The chief law enforcement officer for each political subdivision is responsible for local search and rescue activities. The chief officer may restrict access to a particular area to authorized personnel for the period of time necessary to conduct search and rescue activities.

When a particular emergency event calls for assistance beyond local capabilities, the local emergency management organization calls upon the Department to assist. If further assistance is required, the Department calls on the National Guard and federal emergency response agencies.

#### **Summary of Bill:**

The Volunteer Search and Rescue Account is established in the state treasury to reimburse authorized organizations for operational expenses incurred in assisting law enforcement in search and rescue activities within the state.

“Volunteer search and rescue organization” is defined as any group or entity formed for the purpose of participating in the search for and provision of aid to people in distress or imminent danger. Such an organization is “authorized” if the chief law enforcement officer for the area in which aid is needed has approved its participation in search and rescue activities.

A surcharge of 25 cents is imposed on the sale of all recreational licenses, permits, tags and stamps required by the Department of Fish and Wildlife to fund the Volunteer Search and Rescue Account.

The Emergency Management Division of the state Military Department (Department) is required to establish rules for the processing of reimbursement claims submitted by volunteer search and rescue organizations under the provisions of the bill.

Any authorized search and rescue organization may seek reimbursement up to \$500 from each person for whose benefit search and rescue activities were conducted, provided that those individuals failed to exercise reasonable care or violated applicable laws.

Any claim for reimbursement shall be eligible for payment by the Department if certified by the chief law enforcement officer in charge of the search and rescue activity.

The Department must establish a process by which individuals may appeal a request for reimbursement from a volunteer search and rescue organization.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 15, 2009.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.